



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

**Frank J. Magill,
United States Attorney**

David Anderson, Public Affairs Specialist
(612) 664-5684; cell: (612) 730-2251

News Release

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Polish national pleads guilty to alien smuggling

A 31-year-old Polish national pleaded guilty today in federal court for smuggling two illegal immigrants into the United States in Grand Marais.

Marek Jerzy Struzik pleaded guilty to one count of alien smuggling Sept. 11 in Minneapolis before United States District Court Judge David Doty. Struzik was indicted on Aug. 20.

According to Struzik's plea agreement, he admitted that on Aug. 1 he knowingly and intentionally attempted to bring aliens into the U.S., at a place other than a designated port of entry and at a place other than as designated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Struzik also admitted that he was paid no less than \$1,000 from two individuals for the purpose of gaining his assistance to enter the U.S., and that he brought both individuals to the border and assisted them in crossing into the U.S. by way of the Pigeon River. Struzik then went back across the border into Canada, obtained his vehicle and came through the port of entry.

The plea agreement states that Struzik knew the individuals were illegal aliens from Poland and Slovakia and had not received permission to enter the U.S., and that he was unlawfully assisting both individuals in gaining entry into the U.S.

According to a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol affidavit, two men were arrested at approximately 11:30 a.m. on Aug. 1. The two men said they had crossed the Pigeon River to illegally enter the U.S. The men, from Poland and Slovakia, said they were dropped off by Struzik in Canada at Middle Falls and that Struzik walked with them across the Pigeon River, went back to retrieve his vehicle, and was supposed to pick them up in Grand Portage State Park.

Struzik, who earlier on Aug. 1 had legally entered the country at the Grand Portage Port of Entry, was arrested. The affidavit stated that Struzik told officers that he was contacted in Poland by a man who offered him money to smuggle two people into the U.S. from Canada. The man paid for Struzik to fly into New York City and eventually to Duluth. On July 25, Struzik took a bus to Thunder Bay, Ontario, and was then instructed to fly to Toronto.

There, Struzik picked up the two men at the airport, drove back to Thunder Bay, and received instructions on how to smuggle the men into the U.S. Struzik was paid \$2,500 for his efforts.

Struzik faces a potential maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Judge Doty will determine Struzik's sentence at a future date. This case is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Border Patrol, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Leshia Lee-Dixon.